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## COINS AND MEDALS IN THE STUDY OF ARMOR

A MODERN museum seeks information about its objects of art from all possible sources. If, for example, it needs to assign place of origin and date to its armor, it has recourse to (and exhibits convincingly with the objects themselves) such "documents" as tomb reliefs, brasses, pictorial manuscripts, and especially coins and medals; for these are apt to show not only the exact year when a certain panoply

is illustrated in the present collection on several gold coins. These are "nobles" of Edward III, Edward IV, and Henry VI. In one of these (fig. 1) the victor of Crécy stands in his warship, armored in a brigandine with a chain mail collar, or standard; he bears on his left arm the three-cornered shield-royal, and in his right hand the knightly sword, great pommeled, quillons slightly drooping, its "blood groove" extending nearly to the tip of the blade; he wears the short-cuffed gauntlet and his sleeve of chain mail extends below the



FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

was worn, but contemporary details concerning it. In this connection we mention a small collection of coins and medals, lately presented to the Museum, which will be exhibited in our main armor gallery.

The coins and medals in question illustrate the wearing of armor from the Middle Ages to the close of the eighteenth century. The earliest shows an armored figure, from the middle of the twelfth century, in a Byzantine shell-shaped silver "nomisma." The breastplate here pictured was probably of the kind known as a brigandine, a defense of plates or scales held together under leather or textile by numerous rivets. It goes without saying that in those days there was no effort to represent a personage of earlier date wearing armor accurately of his period. Indeed, one recalls that in pictures of the Resurrection, even well into the sixteenth century, the guardians of the sepulchre were represented in the panoply of the period of the painting; for what knew its artist about the equipment of Roman soldiers?

The war gear of the fourteenth century

reinforcing elbow-cop of that day. A noble of this kind, and especially a "rose noble" (with a rose on the side of the ship), of which we have also a specimen, is sometimes spoken of as the most beautiful coin in the world, with its delicate Gothic lettering and its rose-window-like design on the reverse. Its rival in beauty (fig. 2) is the crown of Jean le Bon (1350-1364), of which two specimens appear in our collection. In these the king is a-horseback, galloping, wearing his heaume and brandishing his great sword; his body bears a surcoat ornamented with fleurs-de-lis, and these appear as well (embroidered?) on his horse's rich housing. The steed's neck is protected by a jointed defense of steel plates, and its head by a large chamfron, such as one sees in the horse of Cangrande on the great monument in Verona. In this horse equipment there appears for the first time a curb-bit with a long arm, so long that by a slight movement of a delicate rein the horseman could exert formidable leverage on the jaw of his charger—in those days there was no S.P.C.A., and the knight could

give neither time nor trouble to humor a restive mount.

Of slightly later date (1364–1389) is the French crown of Charles V, where the king is shown in a long brigandine such as one sees in Case 23 in our gallery. His trunk is covered with a fleur-de-lisé (embroidered) surcoat, and a long hauberk, or shirt of mail, extends to the knees. Knee-cops and elbow-cops are reinforcing elements of this defense, and shins are protected by strips either of metal or of hardened leather (*cuir bouilli*), as was then the fashion. The feet even at that early time were protected by articulated plates of metal (sollerets).

There are few coins in our series dating from the fifteenth century. We should, however, mention a silver thaler, dated 1486, of Sigismund (fig. 3), in which on one side the archduke appears in splendid Gothic panoply, his heaume with its peacock crest standing by his side: on the reverse he is seen on horseback galloping, pennon in hand, now in heavy war gear—deep salade, complete armor, pointed sollerets, and large roweled spurs. His horse trappings are of stuff and trail behind.

Of the sixteenth century we have numerous specimens, including a fine crown of Edward VI (1551), in which the young king mounts a horse completely armored, or barded. Unusually rich in details of armor are our Saxon pieces of this period. In one, for example, a duke of Saxony appears in a deep cape of mail ("bishop's mantle"), of which we exhibit actual specimens near the entrance to the large armor hall. This is a convincing "document" that such defenses were worn in 1541. In the coin numerous elements of complete armor are shown as well, together with a double-handed sword which might have been sketched from a specimen in our collection. On our sixteenth-century medals are pictured an enriched equipment of Henry II of France, and an armored bust of Francis II, the husband of Mary Queen of Scots. An Hungarian coin, dated 1593, appears also in the series, bearing the image of Sigismund Báthori, who appears in a fine splinted breastplate, wearing chain mail sleeves, but having shoulders, elbow-cops,

and gauntlets of plate. He holds in his right hand the curious Hungarian mace.

Of the seventeenth century there are sixteen armored figures in our series. These show the panoplies of such personages as



FIG. 3.

Henry IV of France, James I and Charles I of England, Johann Georg of Saxony, and Oliver Cromwell. Of Augustus of Brunswick-Lüneburg we have a fine silver  $1\frac{1}{2}$  thaler (fig. 4), no less than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, in which the duke's armor ap-



FIG. 4.

pears so clearly that we can almost count its rivets. And his charger is shown in equal detail—a huge white stallion it probably was, like the one which figured for centuries in the Brunswick coat of arms, though the latter lacked the hair-dressing details which figure in the present mane and tail.

For the eighteenth century numerous

panoplies are represented—Tuscan grandees, the great Duke of Marlborough, Charles of the Spanish Succession, the Georges of England, William and Mary, John Campbell of Argyle, whose “Campbells are coming,” Pretenders young and old, Prince Frederick of Wales, and, last of the series, dated 1778, our ally in the Revolution (though not an imposing one), Charles III of Spain. In these coins and medals



CUP, GERMAN  
EARLY XVII CENTURY

the student of armor will find numberless details, including “furnishings” which are rarely retained in museum specimens, e.g., the borders of shoulder plates, which were of satin or velvet, scalloped at the edge and trimmed with rich galloon. B. D.

### AMBER IN THE MORGAN COLLECTION

DURING the late Renaissance period, drinking-vessels wrought from precious substances such as onyx, crystal, and amber, were much in fashion, particularly in the rich burgher communities north of the

Alps where the ornate luxuries of Italy added splendor to the growth of drinking ritual.

The superstitions in regard to the medicinal virtues of amber have existed from classical times to the present. It was worn as a preventive against disease as well as being ground into curative powders. Perhaps such virtues were considered in those days in the light of a safeguard from over-lusty banqueting.

Amber was a favorite substance in Germany, where it has been largely found since prehistoric times, along the Baltic shores. This precious gum of fossilized trees was collected on the beaches, where it was washed up by the sea. It was thus obtained until the eighteenth century, when new methods of mining were introduced. During the Middle Ages, the powerful Teutonic Order of Knights, whose lands stretched along the Baltic, monopolized the trade, which by the sixteenth century had spread to such distributing centers as Bruges, Lübeck, Danzig, and Königsberg, whence it was exported as far as Persia.<sup>1</sup>

The wide-spread use of amber as a material for making vessels of all sorts, as well as jewelry, was due to its glowing color, which ranges from a deep, fiery orange to pale yellow, translucent and clouded, and to its malleability upon application of heat so that it may easily be moulded into any shape desired; when hard, it may be cut like crystal.

The craftsman in Germany during the late Renaissance had attained great skill in the production of the minor arts; he had, moreover, at his disposal a store of ornament patterns from the hands of the greatest masters, such as Holbein and Dürer, and nowhere is the imaginative fertility of the period more brilliantly expressed.

In the Morgan Collection<sup>2</sup> four amber cups and tankards of German origin, dating from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, are examples of exceptional quality. Two of them are tankards executed in dark translucent amber patterned over in low relief, varied by alternating panels of a lighter and clouded

<sup>1</sup>Otto Pelka. Bernstein, Berlin, 1920.

<sup>2</sup>The Pierpont Morgan Wing, Room 8.